

Division 5 Residents and Business Owners,

Please find a summary of the Council meeting held virtually on April 8th. I try and report the most relevant information, but you can always see the Council agenda on our website prior to the meetings to see the full list of items we discuss.

As in the last summary notes of the Council meetings, disclaimers to these summary notes are:

1. They do not constitute Councils decisions. These summary notes are only meant to keep you informed and if there are any conflicts between these notes and the adopted council minutes, the adopted council minutes will prevail.
2. Direction to administration means exactly that. Council provides direction to administration to bring forward additional information which will be included in the future decision-making process. It is common for direction to be given, with the resulting decision being different based on more discussion at the Council table. All final motions of council and the decisions made will be part of the approved Council minutes.

RMA delegation

Council received a delegation from the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), which is the former Alberta Association for Municipalities, Districts and Counties (AAMDC). RMA lobbies both at the Provincial and Federal levels on behalf of the rural member municipalities on issues that are of concern or that can provide an opportunity to enhance the way rural municipalities provide services to their constituents. We are very fortunate, as Mountain View County, that Division 7 Councillor Al Kemmere is the President of RMA and working hard on the behalf of all of us. Some of the issues that RMA is working on are (this is not an inclusive list, but gives an idea of some of the issues that are currently at the forefront):

- Provincial tax deferrals – ensuring the Province puts forward tax deferral programs that can be delivered by the municipalities who must collect the taxes on behalf of the Province.
- Rural Connectivity – lobby support and action to improve rural connectivity
- Keeping up to date on Provincial changes and informing Municipalities on them, making sure we all have the latest data

If you are interested in what RMA does for us please check out their website <https://rmaalberta.com/>.

Budget Discussions

Council has directed administration to bring back a budget utilizing the Provincial Municipal Sustainability Initiative (MSI) grant and Federal Gas Tax grant to be spent as a priority on operating projects where appropriate, such as re-graveling and re-chipping. These grants have specific requirements for spending and can only be associated with certain projects. Council has always given the direction that operations should be funded by revenue and not grants. The rationale for this is that grants can disappear or significantly change and we never wanted a service to be dependent on what

could be considered an unstable revenue source or one that could disappear. The County has in place a long-range infrastructure plan that underpins the capital projects planned for the next 5, 10 and 20 years. This plan also sets priorities for our infrastructure and the main priority is to ensure that we always maintain, to the best of our ability, our existing infrastructure. Therefore, grant money may be utilized in the 2020 budget year to maintain some of the programs, like the re-gravel program as a short-term measure. By using this grant funding, we may also be able to deliver the services for re-gravelling to the original level of \$2.1 million, or the level of the program that administration feels is deliverable under the current conditions. Funding is not the only consideration in setting the service delivery goals for this year, but also staff availability and the public health protocols that may be in place at the time. Council is very aware of the current economic conditions and is doing everything we can to add flexibility to the way we deliver services and how we pay for them whilst always maintaining staff safety and fiscal responsibility as our top goals.

Council passed first reading of the Bylaw 05/20, borrowing for 2020/2021 road paving and bridge projects. The intent of this bylaw would be to borrow up to \$10 million to execute the Bergen Road (Twp 320 between hwy 760 and hwy 22) upgrade capital project that was approved by Council in December 2019. This bylaw must follow the process described in the Municipal Government Act, and therefore requires advertising to the public as well as a public hearing process. By passing first reading, Council is again increasing our flexibility to make decisions once more information comes forward. Prior to making a decision on actually moving forward with the Bergen Road upgrade in 2020, or approving a borrowing bylaw, Council wishes to have the following information;

- The project tender will be released next week and we hope to have the bids received and opened prior to making any decisions. Other municipalities are finding there are large savings to be had right now on construction projects and we are hoping to benefit from that as well.
- More information on our budget and current financial position. We may have additional MSI and Gas Tax grant money left over than can be utilized for other capital projects. Depending on the financial position of the County and the cost of the project, if we were to move forward there is also options to fund the project from the road projects reserve as well or a combination of reserve funding and borrowing.
- We are in the process of submitting our shovel-ready projects to the Province for consideration. There may be some Provincial or Federal financial support for this type of project.

Council has approved Bylaw 06/20, short term borrowing line of credit. The county already carried a \$5 million line of credit and this move is simply just to increase the line of credit to \$12.5 million. This increase will allow the county to cover the operating costs for the county in case property tax deferrals impact our ability to pay the bills. Essentially, the line of credit will be used to pay county bills until the property tax revenue is received. The borrowing bylaw is only valid until December 31, 2020 and therefore we cannot carry a balance on our line of credit over to 2021, it must be paid off by the year end if we need to use it. As previously mentioned, the County does have \$12 million in GICs. However, the penalty for prematurely withdrawing the GICs could be significant, and in most cases the GICs are paying a higher rate than the line of credit which is 2.45%.

Council has also directed administration to bring back bylaw amendments to reflect the property tax incentives and penalty adjustments I wrote about last week. Please note that these are measures to provide assistance to PAY your taxes in support of the current financial hard times that we may all be experiencing. There is NOT tax forgiveness and means you are still responsible for paying your taxes for 2020. There is one additional amendment that was included by administration and is 3(b) below;

1. Property tax incentives
 - a. Keep the tax deadline at Sept 15th
 - b. Offer a 0.5% reduction of total tax bill if paid in full prior to Aug 15th
 - c. Offer a 1.0% reduction of total tax bill if paid in full prior to July 15th
2. Property tax penalties
 - a. Keep the tax deadline at Sept 15
 - b. Waive all penalties if taxes are paid before Dec 1st
 - c. If taxes are not paid by Dec 1st, 1.5% interest penalties will be added immediately and an additional 0.5% interest per month will be applied until the balance is paid.
3. Pre-authorized debit accounts
 - a. Extend the ax pre-authorized debit plan (PAD) sign up to Sept 15th
 - b. A 3-month deferral of the monthly payment program. The 3 months would then be divided up and spread over the remaining portion of the year and be due and payable before Dec 31st without any penalties. Enrollment would not be automatic; it would be on an application basis only. Further details on the application would be forth coming.

We will be having a Special Council Meeting on April 15th to once again go over the budget with the recommendations and direction set by council at the April 8th meeting.

FREC (flood recovery and erosion control) funding reallocation

Council directed administration to send a letter to Alberta Environment and Parks requesting that the FREC funding be reallocated to the Coal Camp hamlet project. In 2014 the County was successful in an application for FREC funding for the berm project west of Sundre. That project was not realized due to a number of reasons, some including downstream impacts that could not be mitigated due to financial constraints. Council requested the money be redirected to protecting infrastructure on Range Roads 55 and 60 south of HWY 584. That project came in well below budget and there is \$1.32 million dollars of provincial funding remaining. The Coal Camp hamlet project involves bank protection along the Coal Camp hamlet to protect residences and county infrastructure from high flow events of the Red Deer River. This project was one of only a few projects that met the FREC funding requirements outlined by the province and is considered to be the best project to spend the money.

Supporting Urban Partners during the Pandemic

Council has directed administration to contact our urban partners to propose repurposing any unused recreation and culture funding received in 2020 from the County for pandemic response. Our council is aware that in these times of self-isolation and social distancing, most of the recreation and culture facilities are closed. We think the funding dollars provided to the urban partners may be better utilized

to deal with the pandemic and want to allow the urban centers flexibility in their expenditure of these dollars.

Support of Agriculture Producers with Spring Harvest Activities

Administration has identified two initiatives to support the agriculture producers with spring harvest activities.

1. Introduction of road ban exemptions specific for the agriculture industry (up to 90% ban exemptions). Operations will be inspecting the roads on an ongoing basis to determine levels of damage and may have to enforce road bans if the damage exceeds operations expectations. Please contact the County for more information.
2. Communication of best practices and regulations for producers that choose to burn crop residue. Producers are encouraged to contact their insurance companies prior to any crop burns to understand the implications of burns. Those considering burning crop residues must obtain a fire permit if activities occur between March 1 and October 31. Please contact the County if you have any questions.